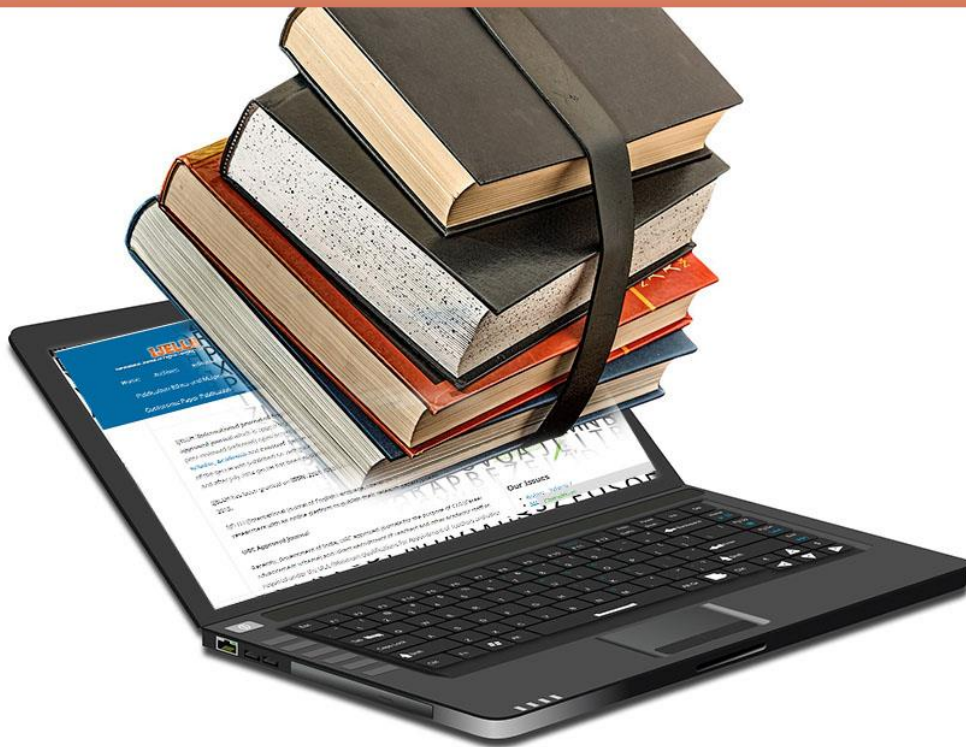


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### Post-colonial Social Representation and Call for Revolution in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novel

#### *Matigari*

#### Abstract

Ngugi, as a realist in post-colonial literature, is praised and honoured across the world. History, culture and modernity are the facets of his writings. He voiced against the all-pervading atrocity of post-colonial power in Kenya. His novel *Matigari* simultaneously showcases the traditional notions of storytelling and modern aesthetic of social representation. He created a fictional hero Matigari meaning 'the patriots who survived the bullets', whose quest is modelled on a famous allegorical journey in Gikuyu (Ngugi's ethnic group in Kenya) folktale about a man looking for a cure for an illness. He fought against colonialists during the struggle for freedom and after independence he realises that under the new lords of the land, Kenyan people are still struggling against the neo-colonial stage of imperialism. This paper is geared towards identifying and discussing those revolutionary elements in *Matigari* and intends to analyse the revolutionary vision of Ngugi in socialistic manner.

Keywords:- Revolution, Postcolonial, Nationalism, Gikuyu

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is well known Kenyan writer who has lived in exile in England and America since early 1980s after his one year's political detention without any charge or trial. His works are engaged with nationalism, Pan-African post-nationalism and post-colonial theory of literature. For him literature is aesthetic and ideological instrument to educate people by opening them to social realities. He believes in decolonizing the African mind through writing in native language. Ngugi wrote *Matigari ma Njiruungi* in 1986 in his native language Gikuyu. It was translated into English as *Matigari* by Wangui wa Goro. As a great admirer of African languages and culture Ngugi states in *Moving the Centre*, "African writers in African languages are engaged in the great adventure and drama of creating a new and great tradition. In this task they have at least two great reservoirs: the heritages of orature and of world literature and culture" (40). He gives the reason to use native language for expression and says, "an African writer should write in a language that will allow him to communicate effectively with peasants and workers in Africa—in other words, he should write in an African language" (Ngugi, 151). *Matigari* follows in African oral literary tradition in its conception, characterization, structural compositional organization, language and details of its temporal, geographical, and philosophical setting (Balogun, 129).

The grim reality of colonial domination and the evils of post-colonial disillusionment in Kenya has depicted in his novel *Matigari*. The characterization, linguistic composition, geographical and philosophical settings employ the fact that it is written in the manner of African oral literature. Ngugi tells in preface of the novel that it is partly based on an oral story about a man looking for a cure for an illness and his quest for the healer Ndiro, he undertakes a journey of search. In novel the central figure Matigari is also in the quest for truth and justice in the country. His quest runs at two levels, first when he went to forest for freedom fighting and the second when he returns and claims for his house and land. Both the levels show the revolutionary ideals of Matigari. During his quest he meets Guthera a

prostitute, an orphaned boy Muriuki, the police, the absurd Minister of Truth and Justice, the workers leader Ngaruro and the people. Through this journey he learns that revolution is the only possible way to get the land and house back. He believes that, “the enemy can never be driven out by words alone, no matter how sound the argument” (138).

His confrontation with Guthera, who was a victim of post-colonial capitalism and her earning through prostitution, made him realized about the gruesome situation of women of the country. It fills his heart with pity and anger and he calls for a revolution to take his home back from the exploiting neo-colonial power. Ngugi symbolises the motherland as house. Matigari says:

The house is mine now, it belongs to me and my family..... That is why I am now looking for my people, my daughters, my sons, my in-laws, my wives...(38)

With the help of Guthera and Muriuki, Matigari finds the house, now owned by the sons of Settler Williams Senior and John Boy. He opposes them and tells them to leave the house. John Boy and his son represent the betrayal of country's elite. He calls them the slaves of Settler Williams and his son. He refers the post-colonial elites of Kenya as slave, and their mind and soul are chained. Matigari tries to unite people and puts the value of being in family forward. He addresses a huge crowd and raises his voice to get the land and houses back, lost in post-colonial era. He invites people to share the house and food together. (51)

He continues to ask:-

Tell me, is it fair that the tailor should go naked, the builder sleep in the open air and the tiller go hungry? (58)

Ngugi in many of his novels, including *Matigari*, depicted the central figure as Messiah taken from his early Christian belief. In *The River Between* story of a boy Waiyaki is represented. He seems natural leader with the light in his eyes, the last in a line of heroic

seers. The prophecies of Mugo wa Kibiro, a celebrated Gikuyu seer referred in the novel as the ancient secret prophecy about a Messiah who will bring the salvation to his people:

Arise—Heed the prophecy. Go to the mission place – learn all the wisdom  
And all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices. Be true to your  
people and ancient rites”. (18)

Jomo Kenyatta was the leader of uprising during the freedom fight. He is often referred to as the much-awaited messianic leader in Ngugi’s novels. As in *Weep Not, Child* Ngugi writes: -

There was a man sent from God whose name was Jomo. He was the Black Moses  
empowered by God to tell the white Pharaoh, “Let my people go!” (23)

In *Matigari*, many events occur to prove Matigari a saviour for the people. his secret escapade from prison makes him a miracle man. Matigari’s stature as a mythical redeemer is built through rumours and that time’s President Moi government in Kenya even started to search this imaginary person in the country to prevent the possible revolution against government. The miracle-working redeemer to appeal against the missing truth and justice is desirable. Although Matigari himself does not claim Christ-like status, Ngugi gives detailed evidence to keep the human figure alive in readers mind. The story of resurrection of a hero led a chaos among people. Ngugi states, “by January 1987, intelligence reports had it that peasants in Central Kenya were whispering and talking about a man called Matigari who was roaming the whole country making demands about truth and justice. There were orders for his immediate arrest, but the police discovered that Matigari was only a fictional character in a book of the same name. In February 1987, the police raided all the bookshops and seized every copy of the novel”. (viii)

Ngugi symbolises Matigari’s belt of peace as the peaceful and prosperous condition of people in the country but he finds, after returning, the freedom not as he expected. To oppose

the exploiting post-colonial power, he removes the belt of peace he had worn earlier and tramples it down to the ground. He now realises 'Justice for the oppressed comes from a sharpened spear' (131), of revolution. He later declares that justice can come only from the armed force of the united oppressed. Later in novel the optimistic approach is visible when Matigari decides to secure his heritage, his culture and his fellow people. He is not afraid of fighting for freedom again, and is ready to build a new house with proper and firm foundation. His call for revolution is heard by the countrymen and at the end he fires up the house of John Boy which symbolises the unity's power to throw out the oppressive government and exploitative neo-colonial elites. People sing 'Everything that belongs to these slaves must burn!' (167) According to Ngugi the war against exploitative evil starts with the burning of the house. People are now at war with the oppressors. Liberation is attained when the people are said to be truly free; when they control all the tools, instruments the means of their physical, economic, political, cultural and psychological being. (Uwasomba, 96)

Ngugi advocates the indigenous culture and language in his novels and as a humanitarian he believes in freedom and equality. He also believes that if a government of people is failed to secure the rights of its people or it becomes the accused of exploitation of people, mass revolution is needed in this situation. Through the character of Matigari he says and questions that, 'There are two worlds.' "There is the world of those, who accept things as they are, and there is that of those who want to change things. Which world do you belong to?" (91) Ngugi depicts a leaderless society as a rider-less horse. The result of Matigari's struggle is violence and at the end it turns out as the case of struggle passed on to the incoming generation when the young Muriuki taking over the struggle after the disappearance of Matigari. Matigari's legacy continues as symbolised in Muriuki when he digs up all the things that Matigari had hidden under a mugumo, a fig tree. He took out the AK 47 and gazed at it. He dug up the

sword and laid it to one side. Matigari's rumour continued: "Everywhere in the country the big question still remained: Who was Matigari ma Njiruungi? Was he dead, or was he alive?" (174). The situation shows that after the disappearance of Matigari will the fire of revolution against evil continue or not?

Ngugi's novels are set within the context of the Emergency, also known as the Mau-Mau Uprising, which was declared in 1952 by the Kenyan people to fight the British colonial occupation of the country. In Mau-Mau war the Kenyans fought to resist British domination and colonization and to achieve independence. Ngugi influenced by the heroic resistance of Didan Kimathi. In *The Trial of Didan Kimathi* (1976) Ngugi shows society's political, economic, and social life is dominated by colonialists, people alienated and their natural rights such as national economy and political power are taken away. The aspect of revolution dominates the play when the 'distant drums grow louder and louder and fill the auditorium with rhythm' (4). The darkness of colonial power covers the entire nation but the Mau-Mau war's drums laminate the path of independence. As Matigari, Didan Kimathi is the symbol of voice against oppression. The chanting goes as:

LEADER: Away with oppression! Unchain the people!

CROWD: Away with oppression! Unchain the people! (5)

Kimathi asks a question, "What revolution will unchain these minds!"(47), shows Ngugi's awareness of the colonial chained collective psyche of the people of Kenya and points out the triumph of the spirit of human liberation struggle.

*Matigari* from all indications revolves around thesis of revolution. This novel expresses the concept of violence as a tool of resistance and celebrates the struggle of people against oppression and exploitation by colonialists. Ngugi presented revolution as the enduring answer to the dominating neo-colonialism. He intended to spread the message of the realization of African people of their position as free and equal society. Ngugi believes that

no one can manage to silence the voices of the masses. Ngugi emphasises that the victory is born of struggle. With the character of Matigari, Ngugi tries to give way to the higher social system of democracy which can only attain by revolution and resistance against evil. In this novel Ngugi's formation of true national culture through the reconstruction of the people's history, language and culture, is visible. Ngugi's nationalism turned increasingly revolutionary with this novel and he perceives literature as an instrument for class struggle.



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